

GREAT START: STATE PROJECT WILL CHANGE YOUNGEST LIVES FOR BETTER

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Michigan's littlest citizens -- newborns, infants and toddlers -- owe Gov. Jennifer Granholm a huge thank-you. In unprecedented fashion, she has made their early development, particularly those born into struggling families, a statewide priority.

Granholm is not just talking. She's got a plan, Project Great Start: Great Finish. It's an inexpensive multi-pronged effort that, if given enough support, could teach the Bush administration a thing or two about truly leaving no child behind, simply by catching them from day one.

Starting at hospital maternity wards, 40,000 new parents will get an instruction manual of sorts, the Read Education and Develop Youth Kits. The box is filled with tools designed to teach parents how to begin educating from day one. Given the state's fiscal crunch, it would be nice if generous corporations or individuals stepped in on behalf of the thousands of other babies for whom the state was unable to provide free kits. An estimated 130,000 babies are born in Michigan each year.

Even without such support, parents are bound to get Granholm's message. They will hear and see it as part of a new TV and radio public service announcement campaign, and at their doctors' offices, where videos will be displayed. They'll get the message at the grocery store, thanks to Meijer Inc., which has agreed to print reading reminders on its grocery bags. Churches have promised to spread the message, in bulletins and via occasional sermons on the long-term value of reading to a child just 30 minutes a day.

These small steps will one day reap huge benefits, planting the foundation for a generation of well-educated employees and employers, something everyone ought to join Granholm in trying to make a reality.

SOURCE: *Detroit Free Press*